

Ideology and Politics: Their Status in Afro-American Social Theory¹

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The great visibility accorded political struggle, in the U.S. black community over the 1960's, has obscured the fact that this group of people still lack a compelling model of themselves, of their purposes in North American society, and of the kind of reasoning which can generate such a model. We see this among political activists when we examine recent controversies over a "race" or a "class" interpretation of the black community, the call to join traditional African customs, the attempts to prevent the rise of a "nationalism" within the black community, the effort to implant "scientific" analysis or the vain search for a glorious black history which has no present and for which nobody has demonstrated a need. The result has been a failure to develop a radical politics which can make unambiguous demands on the American state.

The times seem much like they were in the Age of Washington when social initiatives passed from the hands of blacks into those of Southern and National spokesmen and industrial activists. Yet today as the corrective changes from the Civil Rights Movement have been given such wide attention, it has been difficult to keep persistent theoretical problems in focus and to resolve them. The basis for a militant, self-confident critical assessment of American society was severely modified with the removal of racial segregation. Thus to discuss the problem of ideology and politics, even in terms of the remote future of the black community, challenges us to a new description of contemporary social structure accounting for extensive changes and estimating limits. In order to see the relationship between that structure and theoretical problems it will be useful to relate present day trends to those prevalent during the previous "age."

My working assumption is that, as a matter of principle, the general population is directly confronted by social institutions and adjusts according to a

¹This essay is developed from comments first prepared for presentation at the fifth annual *Conference of the Association of African Historians*, Center for Inner City Studies, Chicago, IL, February 13-16, 1975. Because the subject matter of this essay is seldom evaluated in terms used here I had projected numerous extended substantive footnotes. These have been kept to a minimum both for reasons of time and to limit digressions from the argument.

survival criterion.² We can call this the most elemental force to all individual social action. In the prior historical epoch (circa 1877-1915) when those adjustments took the form of subordination behind the developing walls of racial segregation, individual leaders took it upon themselves to articulate a "theory" to affirm the adjustment. In another epoch, the post segregation era in which we are now, another adjustment is occurring also of massive proportions and, returning to form, other spokesmen are attempting to articulate this motion. Now as then those responsible for the ideology, while they may be condemned for many valid reasons, do stand close to actual changes that people are going through. Today the general black population seems to be readjusting after the upheavals of the Civil Rights Era.

On the face of it these are commonplace remarks with which many would agree. Yet today we seldom hear an effort made to say who is supporting the adjustments and how that group should be approached theoretically. If we were to speculate we might conclude that they are the proverbial cultural or revolutionary nationalists, the new communists, the scientific socialists or the Pan-Africanists. We would be in error in each case. The problem of this essay is to discuss why this question has been so seldom asked or meaningfully answered. In the process it will be necessary to characterize the malaise which has undermined the critical forces in the black community and foisted on them a style of analysis which is escapist. It is my hope that by so doing we can push political discussion beyond mere ideological debate and restore to it both a capacity to criticize social practice and the potential to engender, among black people, a receptive response to progressive politics. So while we may agree pro forma with the need to define the social character of the Post-Civil Rights black community, it should be remembered that this has special importance for those unhappy with the beast.

The Rise of a New Elite

In order to identify those elites who are more intimately connected with mass adjustments, their politicking and their ideology, we can take a hint from a process of analysis used by Frantz Fanon in his evaluation of revolutionary Algeria.³ There he identifies a group of native politicians aligned with the

²Generally I use this term "social institutions" to cover three distinct forms of institutions; political, economic and cultural which may be isolated for purposes of analysis but which interact dialectically to create a given social situation. The epistemological basis for this procedure is in the work of Harold Cruse. See *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow, 1967).

³Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, (New York: Grove, 1965), trans. by Haakon Chevalier with intro. By Adolfo Gilly. Cf. E.J. Hobsbawm, "Passionate Witness," 20 *New York Review of Books* (Feb., 22, 1973): 6-10 and Jack Woddis, *The New Theories of Revolution* (New York: International, 1972).

cosmopolitan sector of the settler politicians and occupying privileged positions relative to the mass of natives. This group assimilates and functions according to the rationalist thought criteria prevalent among the settler bourgeoisie. Such principles ultimately lead it to serve a dynamic nationalist function starting from a class demand for larger participation in the present governing set-up, a demand which becomes increasingly extreme, provoking "repression," expulsion, a resort to independent party organizing, suppression of the elitist party, and finally a resort to the mass party out of which a movement is generated to reclaim the territory and expel the settlers.

This little group of native liberals thus carry through a process which eventuates in a self-determining situation in which a people are now confronted with all the problems and opportunities of an independent social existence. While the particulars of Algeria do not apply to North America, the way in which Fanon conceptualized decolonization there is useful methodologically if we focus on the discrete phases of the process. Thus in terms of formal modeling, we can identify each phase, say what is positive or negative about it, the empirical indices which allow us to project the probability of proceeding beyond a given stage, the changing class dynamics⁴ of each phase (e.g. the extent to which the internal strata maintain traditional or customary loyalties) and how the character of either phase predisposes the general movement towards more or less humane ends. Generally speaking Fanon's model would judge the movement more humane the extent to which prior, received class configurations are dialectically resolved into a new "nation."

In the Afro-American situation I think it is possible to apply Fanon's ideal type. We can identify an equivalent group of activists, relate them institutionally to cosmopolitan sectors of the American bourgeoisie and chart the conflicts or tension between the two groups. In terms of such a process the Civil Rights Movement can be understood in a historically specific sense. We find, however, that the Afro-American elite's function is less progressive than that imputed by the ideal type. Generally the character of the struggle perpetuated by the black elites of North America never set up a situation in which either that sector or any other in the black community could be transformed beyond their received social roles--unless it be toward closer approximations of the authentic models of such

⁴The significance of class categories is tied to the productive relationships in modern capitalist society. Yet the advantages such a society maintains in relation to other societies (e.g. neo-colonialism) depends on politically significant groups who may have no economically productive role. "Class" then is a strained use which, in these cases, may depend more on status or custom and have a different functional significance than is usually the case. I continue to use "class," though without any "scientific" pretensions and consider it part of the broader problem of taxonomy that I briefly discuss below.

roles prevalent in white society. Two mechanisms had accounted for such transformation in the ideal model: (1) the generation, by the liberal activists, of absolute claims against the (settler) state--a condition forced on them by the nationalist demands of another more numerous stratum and concretized in a demand for the land, and (2) the total affirmation of violence which fastened a cover of seriousness onto the struggle and set a tough criterion of skepticism within which any compromise would be evaluated.

In the United States, on the contrary, the state was looked upon as an object to get into and as nearly as it was possible to have an "official" black position on political conflict it was to be grounded in a so-called philosophy of non-violence. The result was an incomplete "black" revolution considered peculiar to North America in which the largely homogenous former slaves developed internal stratification and made peace with the American state.

A black status group then has come to occupy authoritative positions in America which leave them "more free" than during previous eras but closely tied and subordinate to the cosmopolitan sector of the American power elite. The major mechanism covering this tie is the Democratic Party. The McGovern reforms were efforts to formalize a new status for this group of participants in the party. In other crises their strength comes from appointed positions in federal, state and local governments as well as actual offices held in the U.S. Congress, the state houses and local aldermanic councils. Indeed the group of big city mayors is just now probably one of the most glamorous political groups in the entire black world. The significance of these trends may inhere in the fact that probably none of these individuals would have any prominence were it not for politics (i.e. their actual cultural and economic work has been insignificant) giving credence to a charge by Booker T. Washington that "politics is parasitic." Still they exist as a going social force in contemporary America.

But to identify this process and to point to its end result creates a serious problem of taxonomy: what name is to be given the new elite or its behavior?⁵ It is fashionable these days, in some circles at least, to identify the above-mentioned phenomenon and to condemn it as neo-colonialism. Thus Amiri Baraka has so concluded in terms of his discussion of Kenneth Gibson, Mayor of Newark, New Jersey:

⁵If it is the outgrowth of prior historical trends, probably a bias this author would support, we might use black bourgeoisie as developed in E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisies: The Rise of a New Middle Class* (1957). Cf. however, the reservations stated in Oliver Cox, "Introduction" in Nathan Hare, *The Black Anglo - Saxons* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

Newark, New Jersey, (is) a classic neo-colonial creation, where Black United Front of Blacks and Puerto Ricans moved through the late sixties to elect Kenneth Gibson black mayor. Now some of the fruits born of the struggles of the sixties can be tasted in their bitterest aspect. These black faces in high places are simply objective agents of the rule of monopoly capitalism, as cold and as cynical as they have to be.⁶

Yet such neo-colonial analysis is fine only so far. To the extent that it affirms the need for criticism of the situation and of the antagonism there it is fine. Yet the analysis is misleading insofar as it implies that a "coherent" people stands juxtaposed to the new elite with a program of action that has been betrayed. Such might usually be the case in Third World situations where: (1) native culture can be distinguished from alien dominance and, perhaps, corruption, and (2) some kind of social independence has been experienced. In the case of the Afro-American there would be no need for a prefix on "colonialism."

At the very least we must start to focus on the continuity between the Age of Washington and the post-Civil Rights Era. Certainly it is the Gibson's and others who articulate the adjustment that the people have had to make. But like Booker T. Washington, modern elite ideology is directly linked to real necessary living patterns and represent—and I see little reason to think this does not hold for the mass of black people—accurate depictions of some binding constraints of American life. Because the Civil Rights Movement compromised too drastically on the rearrangement of American institutions of order, it failed to modify the real relationship of black people to them and the black elite functions today in a situation in which the prior subordination of their constituency is accepted as a given.⁷ Their honest articulation of this gives them a credibility not to be found among those who play on variations of "blacks should take the lead" slogans.⁸ Indeed such clarion calls can only be considered threatening when viewed by the potential agents themselves. As was true of Washington, modern leadership ideology has the

⁶Amiri Baraka, "Newark Seven Years Later: tUnidad y Lucha!," *26 Monthly Review* (Jan., 1975): 16-24

⁷Alex Poinsett, "Class Patterns in Black Politics," *28 Ebony* (August 1973): 35ff.

⁸The tendency is associated with Grace and James Boggs in their conception of the new American Revolution. Most recently it took the form of a slogan on black workers for the African Liberation Support Committee. See Abdul Akalimat and Nelson Johnson, "Toward the Ideological Unity of the African Liberation Support Committee: A Response to Criticisms of the A.L.S.C. Statement of Principles," (174).

positive aspect of being thus "realistic."⁹ Yet because the subordination of the black community was not engineered by the handiwork of an indigenous class we get a paradox which allows this group to develop and accumulate a reservoir of sympathy. This paradox suggests the peculiar difficulty of applying traditional models to the situation.

To recapitulate: in order to develop a viable model to criticize the black situation it is necessary to have a conception of social structure covering American institutions, and the black masses & elite activists. A black left (i.e. the group engaging in and acting on the actual criticism) is possible only as it is conceptualized outside the Holy Family. Certainly there will be a few reading this who will notice and be disappointed at a definition of the left based on status rather than ideas. Such caution is warranted, but two things justify the definition: one is the absence of an authentic black radical praxis comprehensive enough to withstand the needs of modern political analysis and the other is the co-optation by liberalism during the Civil Rights Era, of the only black radical tradition available i.e. DuBoisian protest. Certain dynamics of the recent politics give further support to the status approach however. For example the uncomfortable suspicion persists that militant radicalization and criticism from the mid-sixties on is directly related to the status of the ideologues relative to the developing liberal establishment. As they have suffered personal exclusion, they have become disaffected with the Civil Rights settlement and open to radical ideas. These conditions set the context for a black left entity to develop. Increasing self-consciousness about this is the key to generating a new criticism capable of withstanding the many rationalizations which legitimate American society today.

We may treat the question of ideology and politics as two phases of the same problem. To those still concerned about removing the fetters from left forces in the black community--and this means first and foremost establishing a dependable basis for criticism--it means close attention must be given to both phases: (1) the subtle but pervasive difference between "ideology" and social analysis or theory and (2) constraints imposed on radical politics by the new black experience which entails actual participation in authoritative U.S. institutions. Neither of these has

⁹ In contemporary circles of "scientific" analysts it might be called materialist. Thus we could emphasize the actual impact of the adjustments on the daily lives of the people and exercise attempts to make this just happy-go-lucky survivalism. But the resort to so-called materialism among this group hardly reassures me that they will be able to grasp reality any better than Alice in Wonderland! In fact their application of the materialist method, in spite of numerous formal definitions, is consistent with the opening statement in chapter ii of Paul's letter to the Hebrews as recorded in Chapter 11, verse 1 of the King James Version of the Holy Bible. For help in locating this citation I am indebted to Rosa Lee Johnson and Viola Young.

been recognized as problems previously even though historical changes have moved them to center stage now. Let us consider each in turn

Ideology

First ideology. Again the main problem here has to do with the capacity to distinguish between "ideology" and effective social theory. What we have seen in the past and especially in the evolution during the 1960's through DuBoisian Protest, Black Power, black nationalism, Pan-Africanism, intercommunalism or Marxism-Leninism is the tendency to select already defined ideology and stipulate the black theoretical task as one of taking it to the people. The consequence of such an effort is to focus attention away from direct analysis of social practice toward "study." The failure of recent activists to take a direct approach to social analysis (consequently settling for previously aggregated "ideologies") may result from their continued and perhaps unconscious reliance on a model of thought developed concurrently with the practical subordination of black people through racial segregation. Thinkers like N.T. Fontaine and L.D. Reddick raised some criticisms of developing black thought in the late 1930's which charged that, in the black community itself, there were tendencies to do analysis already circumscribed by theoretical formulations.¹⁰ A more direct statement of the tendency, albeit one that approved it, can be found in Gunnar Myrdal's classic work *American Dilemma* written after the American pattern of race relations had been set. Of black thinking he said:

Negro thinking is almost completely determined by white opinions--negatively and positively. It develops as an answer to the popular theories prevalent among whites by which they rationalize their up holding of caste. In this sense it is a derivative, or secondary thinking. The Negroes do not formulate the issues to be debated; these are set for them by the dominant group. Negro thinking develops on the presuppositions of white thinking. In its purest form it is a blunt denial and a refutation of white opinions.¹¹

¹⁰ W. T. Fontaine, "An Interpretation of Contemporary Negro Thought From the Standpoint of the Sociology of Knowledge," 25 *Journal of Negro History* (1940): 6-13 and "'Social Determination' in the *Writings of Negro Scholars*," 49 *American Journal of Sociology* (January, 1944); L.D. Reddick, "A New Interpretation for Negro History," 22 *Journal of Negro History* (1937): 17-28.

¹¹ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper, Row, 1944).

What is to be emphasized here is the withdrawal of the philosophic constraint¹² from this peculiar kind of thought by virtue that its "presuppositions" are set outside of any self-conscious epistemology. What it means is that for social theory to be meaningful for blacks (i.e. when done by black thinkers) it must answer a range of practical questions relevant to the world of immediate action or public policy. To the extent that such policy is developed by prejudicial reasoning then blacks have a special obligation to protest. C. Wright Mills isolated this as just one aspect of "political philosophy" and called it ideology.¹³ I follow his usage although we cannot review all of his argument here. Suffice it to say that such "ideology" has as its fault the obscuring of basic criteria in terms of which the significance of practical questions are determined. Thus ideological work proceeds most smoothly when several other theoretical solutions can be taken for granted. Yet at least since the 1930's just such ideology was supposed to have been the special black approach to political theory.

I conclude that in order to provide integrity to social criticism in the Post-Civil Rights area it will be necessary to restore the philosophic constraint. Perhaps some modern theorists will rephrase the danger stated by Myrdal especially to supplement the racialist part implied in his phrase "presuppositions of white thinking." Consequently we may relate the earlier model to recent changes in analysis and account for the continuing tendency to fail to evaluate pre-suppositions even when they bear no relationship to the thought of American racists. In any case it seems well established that past analysis by and about black people justifies the need for careful scrutiny of any proposed theoretical innovations put forth.

A negative point needs to be made here. It is in answer to the query: what is the specific danger of a "black" ideology which is unaware of its presuppositions? The point: it certainly is not an inability to put forth logically consistent descriptions of social actions. In fact political analysis shares with other non-philosophical modes of thought the drive for a systemic rendering of the real world. For example in recent black analysis what was more systematic than Kawaida nationalism or revolutionary intercommunalism? It is interesting though that when one thinks of the litany of European theorists usually relied on to illustrate model social analysis, the unique virtue of political theory may be an inability or unwillingness to explain every facet of the phenomenon as one is sure to find in more "mystical" systems like Christianity or astrology.

¹²Here I utilize some suggestions from Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Change in Western Political Theory* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960).

¹³C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York: Dell, 1962), 12-13.

Further, as political thinkers our efforts to persuade people to an ideology may be self-defeating by tapping, perhaps indirectly, a residue of faith in finality first embedded by the Judeo-Christian tradition (operationally brought to African people by missionaries in one form or another) a continuing source of strength for bourgeois society and a prop for self alienation ever since merry England first proclaimed herself the workshop of the world. Such I think, is the main consequence and danger of calling these ideologies "scientific" when in fact, like all social theory, they remain merely the not-to-successful efforts of a particular people in one epoch. Scientistic¹⁴ thought predisposes us to rush to accept as "concrete" what is nothing more than the product of our wishes. If these are drawn from and set by the crass filth and unrelieved suffering that is American society today, then the function of the left ideologue is to reinforce the pattern of life prevalent in this country. Such primitivism must be overcome.

I call for an approach to social theory that is reflective, critical and purposive. Even use of the word ideology should be curtailed in social discourse except, as it is used--as I do below--as a term to "translate" prior theoretical conclusions or to cover rationalization of privilege. We should think instead in terms of critical social theory that, following Cruse, dialectically relates political, cultural and economic matters into a theoretical form as they so interact in any specific social practice or in general behavioral systems. To paraphrase Plato: black ideologues must either become philosophers or remain the inadvertent purveyors of bourgeois reaction.

Ideology and criticism

To move now to the interplay of ideology and criticism, I have argued that current social trends call attention to the rise of the black bourgeoisie complete with glamorous politicians, mass constituencies and specific change ideologies. Their rise is an undeniable today as were those of yesteryear who amassed the material wherewithal to establish themselves as special among god's children and gave the Western world such slogans as "life, liberty and property," "equality, fraternity, liberty," and "cast down your buckets where you are." This same combination of accumulation and political advancement characterized our modern bourgeoisie elite.

The character of the new criticism will be determined by the relationship of its practitioners to this Bourgeoisie. Its personnel will include those who have not been included among, or saw fit to join, the reigning crowd. What ties the two

¹⁴Adolph Reed, Jr., "Scientific Socialism: Notes on the New Afro-American Magic Marxism," 1 *Endarch* (Fall, 1974), 21-39.

factions of blacks irrevocably together is that we compete for the same constituency: the mass of black people. Those who miss this point and gaze off into a haven of a - racial revolutionary toiling masses are merely refusing to accept the real challenge and capitulating to reaction. The result is a bogus effort to separate what is really inseparable namely the sustained rise of the black bourgeoisie and the series of defeats inflicted on the black left at least since the persecution of Paul Robeson. The consequence of ideologizing has been most pernicious and misunderstood in relation to this process. Thus instead of developing a strategy to meet the real situation we shift ideologies and pretend that that was the problem.

In terms of ideology the criticism has been that the new elite is "neo-colonialist." Yet for reasons noted above, the Black Bourgeoisie constantly complains about America and the data they use--social welfare statistics--are the same ones that the would-be critics appeal to. In the long run the criticism will not clarify theoretical differences and reduces to a call by the black left that the elites go further and/or be sincere. The new critics are not sensitive enough to the changed character of the ideology of the new elite. Again a comparison to Washington is necessary because there has, since that gentleman's death, grown up a myth that his was a philosophy resigned to satisfaction with Negro life. He was, it came to be said, "against change." Yet such an interpretation is strained at best.¹⁵ The appropriate critique of Washington is precisely the image of change he had a very practical one which called for the assimilation of the virtues of the American national bourgeoisie. American society during the Age of Washington was not a settled entity against which calls for change could be raised--rather it was at that time resettling itself and adjusting to new conditions. Everybody was for change. Thus in order to function critically against a change ideology a qualitative selection is necessary which calls for new data, claims and competes for definite constituencies, promulgates new models, and develops a fighting spirit vis-a-vis ascendant definitions of social ills. The new criticism in the black community suffers from an inability to transcend the categories of liberal ideology. Implicit in such a situation is an inadequate model of left praxis which is limited to sincerity and guided by a myth that there exists a quota of moral ideals which are accepted by all and only need application.

We do not get around this problem by selecting a new non-Bourgeois ideology of "new communism," anti-imperialism" or by fanciful beliefs that America is falling under its own weight. On the contrary there must be a dialectical

¹⁵See Louis R. Harlan, "The Secret Life of Booker T. Washington," *37 Journal of Southern History* (August, 1971), 393-416; Judith Stein, "'Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others': The Political Economy of Racism in the United States," *38 Science and Society* (Winter, 1974-75), 422-463.

critique growing in contention with the specifics of the prior model directly linked to mobilizing in relation to the present social structure and grounded in a comprehensive vision of a liberated individual or people. The resolution of the question of the relation of black people to a viable socialist movement in America is dependent on such analysis. Without it socialism merely becomes one more ideology to annoy people with.

Politics

We can understand better the political obligations facing the new black left by tying its ideological and political changes to its increasing elimination from mainstream Civil Rights activity since about 1966 or about the time of Black Power. Since that time criticism has been tied to ideology selected in increasing isolation from the new electoral/administrative experience developing in the black community. Nor has such ideology fared well in gaining mass support. The new black elite is now distinguished both by an actual devolution of authority and a community base. They accepted the constraints of that authority and became legitimate participants in America in the name of black people generally. Those who rejected these constraints longed for a different settlement but have taken a round about route since 1966 to the confusion of the mid-70's in which impotence threatens to become a permanent condition of left criticism.

The relations between these two sectors have been wrought with interest in the last several years of the sixties and early seventies. When the left adhered to various make-shift racial pride-type ideologies, the black bourgeoisie rode chitterlings right into the Waldorf-Astoria to consolidate things with cosmopolitan America. Yet as the black militant has shifted to an ostensible anti-bourgeois stance it has come only to the social welfarism already monopolized by the black liberals. When the black left tried a sort of crypto-terrorist tactic ("off the pig") it found itself resorting to the black liberals to negotiate their "demands" for amnesty or to shorten jail sentences. In 1972, desiring to meet in general session, the Critics had to go to the liberals to call a National Black Political Convention.

In those places where confrontations have occurred we see the same pattern. In the black universities-- from Southern University, Texas Southern Jackson State, Orangeburg, Howard--the liberals are in smooth command and much more enlightened now about their roles; black studies programs are rapidly confirming the most dire predictions of Martin Kilson. The pragmatists control the labor unions. While all American liberals shout hosanna about the way the system worked to "free" Angela Davis, the black left is burdened with the painful reality that H. Rap Brown remains in jail (and faces still further prosecution) and numerous others are exiled in Cuba, Tanzania etc. while lives have been lost, and

uncompensated for, from the university campuses to otherwise obscure apartments in Chicago. With all of this it is amazing that that same left would propagandize itself into locating the "left" and the "right" of the black community on the central committee of the African Liberation Support Committee! It was a tacit admission that they did not want to join the real battle and had conceded a war that never really was declared. In the face of it all we are supposed to turn to the latter day Deweyites in the blue-collar sector of America.

In terms of constituency the criticism has been that the black bourgeoisie has none. They lack, so it goes, a "mass base." Yet in terms of the one unambiguous index of support for leadership among blacks--the vote--liberals have taken the day in every case. The rallies, demonstrations, etc. called by the left have, on the contrary been paltry by comparisons. The failure to recognize this basic fact prompts two observations: (1) that the call for principled ideological debate did not correct earlier errors calling for "operational unity" or "unity without uniformity." Those slogans had obscured the fact that the assembled constituency was really accountable to the liberals. Yet the call for principled debate was naive by virtue that it promoted internecine conflict. (2) It is the critical sector that lacks a competitive base and there seems little reason now not to expect that the black left would join any movement generated if it had a few people participating (and some media coverage). This seems certainly to be the case in the Boston school demonstrations of 1974-75. Long gone are the days when interracial contentions were such that Washington was shouted off the speaker's podium or Malcolm was relegated to the role of spectator at the 1963 March on Washington! Thus the Black Bourgeoisie has a monopoly on the vote and enliven any given protest demonstration through their selective participation. Such a situation is vivid testimony to the hegemony of this sector of the black community and to the squalor of the Negro left.

Several specific tactics have been tried by the left to impact on the black community. We can identify the following five for discussion: (1) the forming of counter-institutions, (2) the move to rejoin allegedly mass-based community institutions, (3) the tactic of "unity without uniformity," (4) the resort to incest, and (5) electoral competition. There are several others that we could identify including independent party organizing a la the Black Panther Party (BPP), continuing protest demonstrations, and specific campus movements including the demand for Black Studies. However, the character of the overall strategy can be illustrated by reference to the basic five.

The first tactic was that of building counter-institutions. It is symbolized by Malcolm X Liberation University (MXLU) started in North Carolina. Other examples include the Center for Black Education and the Institute of the Black

World, in Washington and Atlanta respectively. Of all the tactics this one provides the most direct link with the Civil Rights dissidents because of the close relationship then between Owusu Sadaukai, who organized MXLU, and Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks both of whom were on the Meredith March in 1966.¹⁶ The counter institution tactic illustrates the danger of undialectical shifts among the black left. For in spite of the fact that confrontations had occurred at both A and T State and Duke Universities suggesting the limits of traditional black and white schools for significant social action, MXLU always stood as an entity whose authenticity was to be determined by the purity of its ideology rather than any engaged relationships with institutions in which blacks were actually being socialized. Thus the struggle for counter institutions directed attention away from adjustments people were forced to make on a daily basis. Political party building could be included here but there were few cases of that outside the BPP.

It was during the demise of the BPP however, that we get an articulation of the second tactic: the return to mass based black institutions. Huey Newton concluded that the Panthers had become isolated from the people. His correction for that problem was to have a Grand Return. He suggested two tactics: a focus on the American South and a return to the black church. Such a suggestion was useful insofar as it explicated the isolationism of the counter-institution strategy. What it did not address was the problem of gaining support from the people in these institutions, nor the reactionary basis on which these institutions are maintained. The black preachers in the National Baptist Convention, the Roman Church and, increasingly, the Nation of Islam illustrate the elites operative there and none seem anxious to subordinate themselves to secular politics.

The third tactic, closely related to the previous one, was that of "unity without uniformity." It is symbolized by the Pan-racial movements such as the Congress of African People-Atlanta, the National Black Political Convention, Gary, Little Rock and the first African Liberation Day-Washington, 1972. In one sense it might be seen as the corruption of the prior tactic of returning to the people. For in effect the Return was used as a rationalization to form questionable coalitions with elite elements who claimed to have mass constituencies yet pursued reactionary politics. The experience under "unity without uniformity" certainly illustrates the relative ineffectiveness of the left in these coalitions, however.

A fourth tactic is incest. This tactic resembles the earlier counterinstitution but can be distinguished from it both by the time and ideology involved. It focuses

¹⁶Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: Black Power Back to Pan-Africanism* edited with an introduction by Ethel Minor (New York: Random House, 1971).

essentially on internal purification. The two most recent examples were the purges in the BPP and the "principled ideological struggle" on the African Liberation Support Committee. What happens is the increasing circumscribing of political discussion to smaller factions. Such incest eventually developed in each of the other organizations formed under the "unity without uniformity" tactic i.e. the Black Assembly or the NBPC and the Congress of African Peoples. To the extent that Post Civil Rights criticism aimed to make use of the most effective anti-capitalist critique available (i.e. marxism) there must be disappointment that such analysis has been so closely associated with black incest. It is in just such situations that political discussion can take on an increasing significance.

The final tactic is electoral competition. Here the left competes with the new black elite in direct challenge for public office. This tactic has not occurred too often where there is a real chance of winning. Two outstanding examples continue to be Bobby Seale's campaign in Oakland and the efforts of Baraka in Newark. The related tactic of nominating a candidate who has no chance of winning (historically associated with the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party) is not significant enough to be considered. In assessing the tactic of electoral competition the results are mixed. It is clearly important because such competition is a possible way of placing contrasting ideologies before the people, and to get a "realistic" feel for the practical adjustments that they have made. How effective either of the actual campaigns have been is open to question. On the other hand, the electoral arena is a briar patch for the rabbits of the new black elite, and any oppositional candidate or party starts with a major disadvantage.

The future political behavior of the black left will be dependent on rethinking those past tactics. It seems to me that such rethinking should be disciplined by two concerns. First that the black Bourgeoisie not be allowed to monopolize the experiences now available to the black community for the first time. Secondly in the process of reversing this pattern structural situations need be identified where "anti-bourgeois" analysis can be effectively generated in relation to the new adjustment patterns. In this regard the only solution is the development of a secular party instrument. It is the obligation of the black left to retrigger the Fanonist process and carry it through. To fall back, at this time, on unimaginative slogans, is, to paraphrase the opening paragraphs of the EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE, more farce than tragedy!

Conclusion

This then is the key problem suggested by the title "ideology and politics." It suggests that in the first place for all practical purposes the problem of the left among blacks has been the artificial separation of social criticism and politics and

the limiting of discussion to a caricature of the former. Secondly it calls our attention to the possibility that real politics is now a matter outside of such discussion having to do with the adjustment of the masses. From the Gary and Little Rock NBPC's, the Congress of African Peoples, The African Liberation Support Committee, etc., black political discussion has lost its capacity to be dangerous by disconnecting itself from the real adjustments of the people and occupying, instead, an incestuous world in which are manufactured a "left" and "right," bitterly in contention between themselves, but impervious to living conditions except as these are filtered through Bureau of Labor data. When we speak of the problem of "ideology and politics" for the present or future of black people it is this problem of separation which we must find a way to resolve and integrate, as it were.

A Final Comment On Our Social Scientists

Through it all we can only lament the cringing role of the social and political scientists in these changes. Their refusal to fulfill the promise of social analysis has had two consequences: (1) their own models of the world remain stagnant reflections of the social science developed by the white petty bourgeoisie and (2) impassioned social criticism has passed increasingly to activists and poets and other literati of the black community whose ideologizing remain embarrassing indications of their innocence of the constraints of political analysis. Withal because of the servility of the social scientists, academia stands even more in opposition to our people contributing nothing nor giving respite from the reigning ideologues who take advantage of the splendid possibilities of our cultural ambiguity.